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DEPT FOR AF/C, AF/W, AND PRM
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Embassies for Refugee Coordinator

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SUBJECT: November 2008 Joint US-UNHCR Resettlement Mission to Chad

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: During the joint US-UNHCR Resettlement Mission to Chad, all partners concluded that it is both appropriate and possible to begin a resettlement program for Darfur refugees in Eastern Chad and Central African Republic refugees in Southern Chad. Despite significant logistical challenges, particularly in the East, processing is feasible through coordination with UNHCR and with the International Organization for Migration(IOM)'s active involvement. As security will remain a concern, partners will follow UN security protocols and coordinate closely with N'djamena RSO to respond appropriately to security issues. UNHCR committed to referring some 90 refugee cases (approximately 450 persons) by the end of calendar year 2008 for a pilot processing initiative in Spring 2009. UNHCR established a target of 5,000 referrals in calendar year 2009, which will require additional resources and/or the establishment of an appropriate P2 group.

TRIP OVERVIEW: ESTABLISHING RESETTLEMENT PLANS

¶2. (U) PRM Admissions Deputy Director Larry Bartlett, Ndjamen Refugee Coordinator Perlita Muiruri, and Accra Refugee Coordinator Emily Mestetsky participated in a UNHCR-organized resettlement mission to Chad from November 3 to November 12, 2008. UNHCR was represented by Vincent Cochetel (Resettlement Chief-Geneva), Malika Floor (Senior Regional Resettlement Chief - Dakar Hub), and Bertrand Blanc (Resettlement Officer N'Djamena). Accra DHS/USCIS Officer in Charge also participated in the opening meeting. The key implementing partners of the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) were also represented: OPE Accra by Director Vicky Knight and IOM by Regional Medical Officer Dr. Qasim Sufi. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was also included in the mission, as a current implementing partner of psycho-social programs in Chad, resettlement programs in Nairobi, and a potential resettlement referral partner in Chad.

¶3. (U) The mission began On November 3 in N'Djamena with meetings with UNHCR and host government officials. The team then proceeded to the South to Gore and the Dosseye refugee camp as well as to Abeche and the Gaga refugee camp. In both Gore and Abeche, the team met with UNHCR officers, implementing partners, local government officials and refugee representatives. OPE and IOM also conducted preliminary site assessments of potential processing locations and medical facilities. The team returned to N'Djamena on November 7 for strategic planning meetings with the UNHCR country office and to out-brief the Embassy.

¶4. (U) At the close of the trip, the team had developed a plan to conduct pilot processing of 60 refugee cases in Eastern Chad and 30 refugee cases in Southern Chad, including an estimated total of

400-500 refugees. UNHCR Chad has already begun making individual referrals of refugees with particular protection or medical concerns, under UNHCR's standard resettlement criteria. Referrals are expected by December 31, 2008, OPE pre-screening is anticipated to occur in February, and DHS interviews in March. In Eastern Chad, PRM has requested that UNHCR limit the referrals to the four camps around Farchana, given the difficult logistics involved in accessing more remote camp locations. IOM will facilitate the movement of refugees from the camps to Abeche and Gore for resettlement processing and provide temporary transit facilities, care and maintenance where and as needed. This departure from usual procedures in West Africa - where UNHCR handles logistics prior to DHS approval - would be required in this logistically complex environment. Processing steps will have to be compressed to minimize time in the transit center in the pilot phase. UNHCR will identify office space for processing and DHS adjudications for the pilot phase and until the program has grown sufficiently to necessitate the establishment of a separate facility. With expedited processing, the first departures could take place in the third quarter of FY09.

15. (U) The pilot will provide an opportunity to address potential challenges in resettlement processing in Chad. In addition to the challenging security and logistics, there are several issues that may arise during adjudication. One of the issues among both Eastern and Southern refugee populations is the large incidence of polygamous unions. Some of these marriages are forced or involve underage brides. In both the East and the South, marriage is considered a form of security, providing refugee women and girls with a male protector. Such relationships would have to be addressed in order to comply with US law and receive affirmative DHS

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adjudication decisions. In the East, many of the refugees are sympathetic to some of the Darfuri rebel groups; some may have been involved as combatants; and others may have provided material support. These may be considered as inadmissibilities by DHS/USCIS adjudicators. It is possible for the Departments of State and Homeland Security to seek a waiver for certain groups; such a waiver would likely be required for many Darfuri refugees.

16. (U) The pilot would be an interim step in establishing a larger on-going resettlement program in Chad. In its annual Global Resettlement Needs report, UNHCR Chad had estimated the resettlement need for calendar year 2009 at some 4,800 individuals, based on data already collected. Field officers indicated that the number is likely much higher. During the mission, the UNHCR set a target for refugee resettlement for 1,000 individuals in the South and 4,000 individuals in the East. During the mission, UNHCR stated it will include the required additional resources in its 2009 Resettlement Initiative funding proposal. Partners also agreed that in the East, a P2 group would provide the most appropriate vehicle for referral, given the projected number of referrals and the commonality of the refugee claims of the refugees who fled Darfur. The 4,000 referrals in 2009 and any P2 group would initially be limited to the four camps under the Farchana office as these camps are more easily accessible and host the longest stayers, who began arriving in 2004. Given the lack of return prospects to Darfur in the medium term and the extremely limited prospects for self-sufficiency or local integration in Eastern Chad, resettlement would likely continue for several years to come.

UNHCR CHAD: Progress on Resettlement

17. (SBU) UNHCR Chad has begun to overcome the obstacles that had impeded the submission of the 50 referrals anticipated in calendar year 2007 and which reduced the 2008 referral target from 970 to 400 individuals. Although the PRM Resettlement Initiative provided funds to create resettlement positions in Chad, the jobs have only recently been filled. The full-time Resettlement Officer arrived in September and two of three NGO deployees have also just recently arrived. The office has begun making referral submissions, with close to 100 individuals referred by mid-November and is progressing towards the adjusted goal of 90 cases. As the program grows, there

will likely be a need for additional staff, as well as more concerted efforts in recruitment. It must be noted that the staff are constrained by the limited number of hours they are able to spend in the camp and the requirement to take a minimum of one week leave every six weeks. Abeche has only one officer who can enter data into the ProGress database, so either additional staff or more flexible procedures are required.

¶8. (U) The participation of Vincent Cochetel, the head of the Resettlement Service in the Department of International Protection at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, was instrumental in solidifying UNHCR-Chad's commitment to use resettlement as a protection tool in a manner consistent with worldwide policy and procedures. He underscored UNHCR's commitment to ensure that refugees in Africa, including Chad, are not excluded from resettlement. Similarly, Larry Bartlett underscored the United States' commitment to making this durable solution available even in the challenging Chad environment, as the US had done in similarly difficult locations around the world.

Chad Government: Positive Response to Resettlement Team

¶9. (U) The team met with Chad's National Commission for Refugees (CNAR) Executive Secretary Mahama Nour Abdoulaye, the Protection Chief and the Legal Advisor. Larry Bartlett explained the United States Refugee Admissions Program, stressing the need for partnership with the host government and with UNHCR. CNAR welcomed this program and offered to assist to help avoid problems and potential corruption. Other than a request that the criteria for resettlement be clearly explained to the refugees, CNAR had no concerns and appeared enthusiastic about resettlement as a way to help some vulnerable refugees.

Embassy Support for Resettlement Program

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¶10. (U) PRM appreciates the generous Embassy support given to N'djamena-based refugee coordinator as well as to this mission. The RSO provided useful information on the security situation and agreed in principle to conduct site surveys of the space that will be used by DHS/USCIS refugee adjudicators. PRM will coordinate with Post on the hiring of an Assistant Refugee coordinator, a position that will also serve to minimize upcoming missions' impact on the Embassy. Accra and N'Djamena refugee coordinators will continue to coordinate on upcoming missions and RSO clearance on the adjudication site, with the final instruction cable to be sent from PRM and DS Washington.

SOUTHERN CHAD: Cases, logistics, and expectations

¶11. (U) During the visit, the team met with UNHCR Head of Gore Field Office Monica Sandiri, field office staff, local government officials, and refugee leaders. The team met with refugee leaders in the Dosseye Camp and briefly explored perceptions about current conditions in the camp, acceptance by the local Chadian community, the potential for return to the Central African Republic, and interest in third country resettlement.

¶12. (U) The UNHCR field office in Gore administers a program for some 53,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in five camps in the south. Three are situated near Gore in the Southwest and two near Danamadji in the Southeast. Arrivals began in 2003, when an estimated 55,000 entered Chad and smaller numbers are continuing to arrive at 100 per month. CAR refugees have been recognized on a prima facie basis, the majority of which are from the Peuhl tribe, nomadic cattle herders from the CAR. UNHCR programs in the South have focused largely on self-reliance with a good degree of success, but there remain a significant number of refugees with particular protection or medical needs. Protection officers in the field have

already begun identifying such individuals for resettlement referral. UNHCR also plans to re-verify registration data on refugees in the South in order to better determine the potential magnitude of an on-going program and elicit additional refugee referrals.

¶13. (U) Conditions in the South are basic, but resettlement processing is feasible given the availability of generators and satellite communications. Security conditions in the South are good and Gore is accessible from N'Djamena by a 6-7 hour road trip or by flight to Moundou. UNHCR has established a good platform for its operations in the South and has offices, housing, internet, and other communications equipment that the USG could access for initial operations. If the program is to grow in FY2010 and beyond, there would likely be a need to build offices and housing facilities for OPE and DHS staff involved in processing and adjudication.

¶14. (U) The IOM medical officer, Dr. Qasim surveyed the MSF hospital in Gore as a possible site for IOM's medical screening and found it suitable, so long as MSF continues to work at the hospital beyond their planned May 2009 departure date. As a backup, Dr. Qassim surveyed the hospital in Moundou and concluded it can host x-ray and laboratory work, the two most complicated elements of refugee medical screening.

EASTERN CHAD: PLANS FOR DARFURI RESETTLEMENT

¶15. (U) In Abeche, UNHCR briefed the group on the lack of real possibilities for self-sufficiency, local integration or repatriation in the near or medium term. There are significant protection needs and a large number of Darfuri for whom resettlement would be both a protection tool and a durable solution. In addition to refugees meeting UNHCR resettlement criteria (medical, disabled, women-at-risk, elderly, unaccompanied minors, and survivors of violence and torture) UNHCR also expressed concern for adolescents at risk of military or rebel recruitment or forced marriage. UNHCR's Abeche office is working to complete referrals for 60 cases (350-400 individuals) by the end of calendar year 2008 for the pilot processing program anticipated in the spring. In calendar year 2009, UNHCR will work toward referring 4,000 individuals, but they also noted that they will be requesting additional resources under

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the Resettlement Initiative to meet this goal.

¶16. (U) The team visited the Gaga office (a sub-office of the Farchana field office) and the Gaga refugee camp, a 2.5 hour bumpy drive from Abeche. In Gaga, in separate meetings with representatives of refugee men and women, the team discussed conditions in the camp, coping mechanisms, and durable solutions, including resettlement. The women had all experienced severe violence and torture, but views on resettlement differed by age. Older women thought that they would likely die in the camps, but would consider returning home when Bashir and the Janjaweed were ousted. Younger women were unwilling to return and interested in resettlement. In the men's meeting, the prevalence of polygamy was raised and the fact that most resettlement countries would not allow them to maintain two wives. Despite the challenges of an abrupt shift in lifestyle and occupation, at least a quarter of the men present expressed interest in potential third country resettlement.

¶17. (SBU) Resettlement referrals to date have been based on individual identification by protection and community services staff. Given the limited staff, limited time in the camps, and the enormity of the need, other methods would be required to adequately address resettlement needs. The Abeche office is conducting a verification exercise for the camps, with the exception of Am Nabak where refugee resistance has impeded effective registration. During the verification, officers will be confirming family composition and noting individual vulnerabilities in the ProGress database. This would allow for the more proactive identification vulnerable refugees and could be used as the basis for P2 group resettlement.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE NEEDS

(U) Each meeting during the mission revealed two key issues concerning refugee resettlement. First, there is a large number of vulnerable refugees for whom resettlement would offer life-saving protection. Second, refugee resettlement will be logistically challenging. In its evaluation, the team concluded that the needs of the refugees in Chad merited taking steps to address the logistical challenges. Arrangements will be coordinated through UNHCR, to the maximum extent possible. As noted previously, PRM will seek Post assistance in hiring a Refugee Assistant and in conducting security surveys of interviewing sites.

¶19. (U) This cable has been cleared by PRM/A Deputy Director Larry Bartlett and N'Djamena Refugee Coordinator Perlita Muiruri.

TEITELBAUM